

The Standard Bearer

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Special issue

Sexual abuse: Grievous sin in the church

My refuge and my fortress

Rev. Steven Key

What must the PRCA learn about sexual abuse?

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

The abuser

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Offending the little ones of Christ

Rev. William Langerak

Church leaders and sexual abuse

Rev. Nathan Decker

Resources related to sexual abuse

Rev. Erik Guichelaar

I am a victim, survivor, and overcomer

Anonymous Survivor



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Meditation

Rev. Steven Key, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado

My refuge and my fortress

Sometimes our *Standard Bearer* meditations are abbreviated sermons, prepared, we trust, for the edification of a larger audience than the congregations we serve. This is not such a meditation. This one is on the order of a pastoral visit, as we sit down and face the tormenting trial of one who has been sexually assaulted. May God use it for comfort and to assist in the restoration of spiritual peace to those having been thrown into turmoil.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Psalms 91:1-4

Secret place. For some that very expression might bring back memories, terrible memories. Horrible atrocities have taken place in secret places. Such is generally the case with those who are victims of sexual assault. They did not give consent to the sexual behavior or contact to which they were subjected. They were forced, intimidated, manipulated, or coerced by someone, perhaps a stranger, but more likely someone well known to them and perhaps in a respected position of authority over them. I well remember early in my ministry visiting an elderly man whose days on earth were nearing their end. There was something he needed to talk about. It had tormented him his entire life, though he told no one. As a young boy in the Netherlands, he was sexually molested and abused by an adult neighbor. Nearly 80 years had passed. Satan was still using those memories to torment him, the memories of things done to him in a secret place because the perpetrator of that assault knew in his soul the wickedness of his actions and would seek to cover it up, to keep it secret.

It can be painful, even seemingly insurmountable, to talk about things done in secret places. It is one thing

to know, as Scripture reveals to us, that the Christian life is a life lived on a battlefield. It is quite another to experience the carnage, especially that which occurs in secret places. If they are survivable acts, the victims of those atrocities will carry those events with them the rest of their lives. If they do not carry the scars in their bodies, they carry them in their souls.

How are we to respond to the carnage wrought by sin, and sometimes by the instruments of Satan? Some respond by embracing their victimhood. Their lives are tormented by the memories. But sometimes it seems easier just to be a victim, to wallow in it, to live in bitterness and hatred toward the perpetrator, than even to think that there is another way, a more healthy way to confront the demons of the memories.

If we look at the over-arching story of our lives, there are sub-stories in which we are the objects. To be assaulted sexually, no matter the form of that assault, is to be made an object of a self-serving person's lust. That might be one of a multitude of stories that stand as segments of our earthly life.

But let us not lose sight of what I refer to as the over-arching story of our lives. It is the story of redemption, the story of the wonder work of God's grace in saving us. When He saves us, He embraces us as His own by faith in Christ Jesus. Our Jesus has made us His own possession. We belong to Him in body and soul, in life and death. For that reason, and because that work is God's work and does not depend upon us, it is the story of our receiving by faith in Christ Jesus healing and freedom, safety and joy, no matter the injuries we have suffered, the degradations, the defilements, the humiliations, and hurts. It is the story of having our shame and all sense of guilt removed. It is the story of God thinking upon *us* (Ps. 40:5), thinking upon *you* (Ps. 40:17), cleansing you, redeeming you, drawing you to Himself, bestowing His love upon you in His only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the story of Him who so works in us by His Holy Spirit that we confess with the inspired apostle in Romans 8:35-39,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy

sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So we can reflect upon the secret place referred to in Psalm 91:1, the secret place of the most High. In this case the secret place is a hiding place, a place of shelter and protection. The Lord knows we need a place of shelter. We need that place always. But there are times when He makes us more conscious of our need for shelter. And because God knows us and loves us, He directs us to His secret place, His shelter for us. It is a place of refuge from all the storms of this world, a refuge under Him who cares for us, a place where we learn to hang on to the most High by faith, like a troubled child clings to his mother's leg.

That this special place of safety is a secret place, a hiding place, means that it is known only to the most High and to those who dwell there. They alone have access to this place. We might ask how it is possible for someone like us, defiled and shame-filled creatures, damaged goods in the eyes of many, to enter the presence of the most High, to abide under the shadow of the Almighty. What would the Almighty God have to do with me?

God has revealed to us a password to His hiding place. As in the Old Testament, so today that password is the blood of atonement. By the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ we have access into the dwelling place of the most High, the place of His covenant fellowship and loving embrace.

The text speaks also of abiding under His shadow. To have the shadow of a companion fall on you means not only that you are very close to him, but also that he is bigger than you. Verse 4 says, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." What a beautiful picture of the Lord's nearness! Not only does He care for us, but He protects us.

The person who dwells in the secret place of the most High *shall abide* under the shadow of the Almighty. *Shall abide* speaks of spending the night there, lodging with the Almighty. Night. Many fears come at night. Perhaps what was done to you happened in the night. Night can mean trouble sleeping, night sweats, recurring nightmares. Night is not a pleasant time when there is no rest. But the Lord provides us lodging with Him in the night. He cradles us in His arms as a mother her infant. And while men cannot always provide safe-

ty, the One who provides us this lodging is the Almighty. Through the whole dark night we are under His providential and protective care. He holds us, loves us and cares for us in our fears and sorrows, until the day He brings us to our heavenly home.

The psalmist speaks here a wonderful statement of fact. This is no exhortation, no urging to flee to the secret place in time of trouble. The child of God speaks a simple but profound statement of truth. This is something we often find in the psalms. That is why we love to sing them. They are so true, so concrete in setting forth the unchangeable truth of the unchangeably faithful Jehovah.

Psalm 91, verses 2 and 3, repeats and emphasizes the truth set forth in the first verse: "I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence."

What a profound confession, what a wonderful truth, God gives us to confess! We live in the midst of death and all the horrors that arise out of hell. But then we hear this amazing word of God, this astounding statement of truth: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." This confession is prompted by the work of Christ within us. When you study Psalm 91 in the light of the New Testament Scriptures, you see that it is principally Christ who speaks here. Even the devil knew this when he misquoted part of this psalm to tempt Jesus. Christ makes this confession prophetically through the psalmist, as He would come to dwell in this dark night in our weak, sorrowing flesh. That is demonstrated elsewhere in the psalms as well.

Some matters are so terrible, some experiences in life so traumatic and painful, that the subject is almost untouchable. But Scripture speaks of such an untouchable subject. It is addressed prophetically by David. That is, he speaks as the mouthpiece of the One who would actually bring to expression the experience of his torments:

They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.... I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture (Ps. 22:13-15, 17-18).

You might recognize those as the words of our Savior, words that express the torment that He endured. But do not overlook the fact that those words also reveal

what it took to save us. Something so terrible was used by God to save us.

The gospel does not take away the trauma that we have experienced. Rather, by the gospel God draws us to Himself and gives us to know Him in a way that we never could have known otherwise.

So we sing from Psalm 13, Psalter #22:

O Lord my God, behold me,
And hear my earnest cries;
Lest sleep of death enfold me,
Enlighten Thou my eyes;
Lest now my foe insulting

Should boast of his success,
And enemies exulting
Rejoice in my distress.

But I with expectation
Have on Thy grace relied;
My heart in Thy salvation
Shall still with joy confide.
And I with voice of singing
Will praise the Lord above,
Who, richest bounties bringing,
Has dealt with me in love.

Editor's note

We “sigh and cry.”

In your hands is an issue of the *Standard Bearer* unlike anything we have ever produced, for an occasion the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) have never before publicly faced. Sexual abuse. If it is a shame even to speak of what the Gentiles do in secret (Eph. 5:12), how much more so the abominations that take place in the church. But we must speak, in order to expose, repent of, and root out what is so dishonoring to God and so destructive to victims.

When the prophet Ezekiel was commissioned to speak against Jerusalem's abominations, God gave him very peculiar visions to make clear His message of judgment. In one vision Ezekiel dug a hole in the wall of the temple to see what evils were performed in the darkness, including sexual perversions (Ezek. 8). Each time God led him farther in to see more (or worse) evils. For these evils, God would send His avenging angels, armed with battle-axes (9:1), to destroy the impenitent in Jerusalem. But God would spare some who “sigh and cry” for the atrocities. These penitent believers sighed (inwardly) and cried (outwardly).

John Calvin concludes his comments on this section of Ezekiel with these words: “The prophet therefore here exacts more from the sons of God than secret groaning, when he wishes them to groan openly and vociferate [to cry out loudly]; so that they bear witness that they abominate those things which God has condemned in his law.”

Many in the PRC and other churches have been sighing quietly. This special issue is a beginning, perhaps only feeble, effort to “cry out” openly. May God hear our cries, spare us the judgments we deserve, and prevent any from self-righteous indignation.

Rationale for this special issue hardly need be given. The articles themselves will make that clear. The painful reality of sexual abuse both outside and inside the church demands treatment that a single article cannot give it. The editors laid out a plan for various topics and received immediate and positive response from all who were invited to write. An unusual requirement was given to each writer to have their article peer-reviewed by at least two others before it was submitted for printing. The editors required that each article be reviewed by others who are knowledgeable of the subject—by their own experience, or by training—so that justice is done and offense minimized as such a difficult and sensitive matter is treated.

A special note regarding the article anonymously written. Although the author was willing to be identified, the decision was made to retain anonymity. This anonymity is not to send messages to the abused that they must remain hidden, nor to the perpetrators that they are afforded secrecy. The intent is rather to focus on the issue rather than on the persons or the locale.

Finally, a hearty thanks to all the writers, to the victims (both men and women) who helped the writers by relating their own stories and reading the articles, and to graphic designer Erika Kiel (Kalamazoo PRC), whose cover design reflects what words cannot convey.

May the Lord hear our sigh and cry, bring to sincere and complete repentance those who are guilty, judge and remove the impenitent, help the church be more faithful in her response to such abominations, and graciously, miraculously, and tenderly heal the abused.

—BLG



Editorial

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Crete Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois

What must the PRCA learn about sexual abuse?

This special issue on the subject of sexual abuse was not planned in the realm of the abstract and theoretical. It was occasioned by a number of concrete cases of sexual abuse reported in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRCA). Victims have stepped forward to reveal the vile sins committed against them. Real perpetrators have been exposed.¹ Consistories have devoted, and continue to devote, a great deal of time to administering discipline to abusers and comfort to the abused.

What has especially served to bring this subject to the forefront of members' minds is the recent case of a senior minister in the PRCA. In the summer and fall of 2021, at least six women came to his consistory to reveal that they had been sexually abused by him. He abused his position and authority to prey on young, vulnerable women who came to him for pastoral care. It was revealed that the man's abusive behavior has been going on for at least the past 18-20 years. The result for the women abused by him has been serious emotional, psychological, and spiritual harm. Having thoroughly and carefully investigated the case, the man's consistory suspended him from his office. They came to a meeting of Classis East in January 2022 and sought approval to depose him from the ministry, and Classis approved that unanimously.

Such cases force us as a denomination to ask: What must we learn as churches with respect to sexual abuse? I propose the following four things that I believe the PRCA *must* learn. These are by no means exhaustive, but they are the matters that I judge to be most pressing.

1. We must learn that the sin of sexual abuse exists in the church, including in our churches.

Sexual abuse is not an issue only "out there" in a world that is violent and sex-crazed. It is not an issue only "out there" in the Roman Catholic Church. It is a crime performed in the Christian and Reformed church

world. As recent events have shown, it is an evil perpetrated in the PRCA. At this point in time, to view the matter as not an issue in our churches is to be willfully ignorant.

In fact, it is possible that sexual abuse may be found in the church even more than it is in the world. Churches are often naive with respect to sexual abuse and how to handle it. Churches teach that we are to view the neighbor charitably and judge his words and actions in the best possible light. Churches promote mutual trust among the members. Churches preach forgiveness for even the worst of sinners. Knowing this, abusers use churches as hunting ground because they believe they can easily manipulate these truths and use them to pursue victims and cover up their crimes.

What this means is that there is a staggering number of men and women in our churches who have been sexually abused, likely many more than we imagine. What a grief that so many of our brothers and sisters deal on a daily basis with the trauma of abuse!

If anyone should be on guard against sexual abuse, it is the church!

2. We must learn the true nature of the sin of sexual abuse.

All sin is sin, but there is something about the sin of sexual abuse that makes it uniquely destructive and, therefore, abhorrent.

We need to learn, first, that the sin of sexual abuse can take on many forms. Too often we think that sexual abuse means that a person has experienced full-blown, forced sexual intercourse. For some, that is the case. But this does not exhaust the forms of sexual abuse. In addition to other forced sexual acts involving unclothed genitalia, sexual abuse may involve the touching of a clothed person's upper thighs, genital areas, breasts, and shoulders. Sexual abuse may involve prolonged hugging and lap-sitting. Sexual abuse may involve inappropriate exposure to or forced viewing of pornographic material, sexually suggestive comments, or inappropriate conversations about sex. For some to say, "He only put

¹ For simplicity sake, I refer in this article to abusers using the masculine pronouns (he, him, his), but it ought to be noted that abusers may also be females. For proof, see the anonymously authored article later in this issue.

his hands on her while she had clothes on, so that can't be sexual abuse," betrays ignorance regarding this sin. Such ignorance explains in part why abusers can carry out abuse in public and in full view of others.

Second, we must learn that the nature of this sin is not only sexual. Sexual abuse is not only a matter of the *seventh* commandment (forbidding adultery), although it is that. Sexual abuse is fundamentally a violation of the *sixth* commandment. It violates, takes, destroys, hurts, and therefore kills the victim. In addition, sexual abuse is a matter of power and control over another, an attitude of "I can do what I want to another and get away with it." The sexual nature of the sin serves that attitude because abusers can most powerfully express power and control over another sexually. Sexual abuse also involves a violation of the *ninth* commandment. An abuser is a habitual liar and master manipulator. The whole charade is kept up by his appearing to be such a nice guy and by his manipulation of victims and their parents through gifts and/or threats.

Third, we need to learn about the devastating effects this violence has upon a victim. Do we understand that of all sins this one seems to bring more shame upon the *victim* than upon the *perpetrator*? Do we understand the confusion a victim feels? Do we understand that, though the abuse is emphatically not their fault, they blame themselves for not doing enough to stop it or for not speaking out sooner? Other articles in this issue will say more about the effects, but the point is to show that we have so much room to grow in our understanding of what this sin does to a person.

In order to help the abused and to correct the abusers, as churches we must come to understand the true nature of these sins.

3. We must learn how rightly to respond to cases of sexual abuse.

There are many wrong ways for churches and individuals to respond when victims of abuse bravely step forward to report what has happened to them.

Disbelief: Often the response to a report of sexual abuse is a refusal to believe. Many think (and say): "This could not have happened. I don't believe it." They view the abuser as such a respected figure, while the abused is perhaps viewed as a depressed, delusional, attention-seeker (cf. the warning in James 2:1-7). So, they side with the abuser over against the abused.

Covering: A report of abuse may be received and believed, but then the church does all she can to keep it quiet. The abused might be told that the sin is a private sin, and she has to "walk the way of Matthew 18" with

her abuser, so the consistory will not be involved. If the consistory does get involved, no report is made to the authorities, perhaps out of a wrong fear of the world getting involved in the business of the church. No information is given to the congregation, perhaps out of a misguided desire to spare the abused any shame. The whole approach is governed by keeping things as quiet as possible.

Minimizing: When abuse is reported, some might minimize the effects of the sin. Some might say, "Well, at least you weren't raped. All he did was put his hands on you. It could be worse." The impression is left that there ought not be any trauma, there ought not be any difficulty "getting over it" since it is not "such a big deal."

Haste: There is such a thing as proper haste, which is the haste to deal with the sin seriously. But the matter can be handled with improper haste. There is an improper haste to rush the victim through the process of healing and forgiveness. There is an improper haste to rush the abuser to make a quick confession of sin and then to reconcile him to the church and the victims.

These wrong responses likely stem from ignorance of the nature of abuse and its effects, a fear of having to do the hard thing even though it is right, or a well intentioned but mistaken understanding of what "covering a multitude of sins" involves.

It is not too strong to say that the effects of these wrong responses are catastrophic for the victims. Rather than finding the church to be a safe haven of refuge and care, they find that the church has essentially turned on them. Their trust in the church, her leaders, and her members is shattered.

And you can be sure that other victims are silently watching how the church handles the cases of victims who do speak up. When the church mishandles those cases, other victims sadly conclude, "If that's the response, I will never feel safe to disclose my abuse." There may be other factors involved, but this lack of trust in the church often is one of the factors involved in the delayed reporting of sexual abuse.

Think also about what the church unwittingly is saying to abusers by these wrong responses. The church, in effect, is saying to abusers, "Here is a place of refuge for you! Here you will find it very easy to continue your abuse!"

Have we as churches and as individuals responded wrongly in the past (and present) to sexual abuse? God forgive us! And give us the humility to learn from our past failures so that we do not perpetuate them.

How do we as churches and individuals properly respond to reports of sexual abuse?

Take it seriously: It is certainly possible for someone to make a false claim of sexual abuse. Every report of sexual abuse must receive the due process of investigation. At the same time, knowing that abusers are master manipulators, our response will not be: “She’s lying. He couldn’t possibly have done this.” Instead, our response will be: “It’s very well possible that he could have done it. If he’s an abuser, then he very well could have fooled me.” Our knowledge of abuse ought to lead us to handle every charge with the utmost seriousness.

Openness: The church will not handle a verified case of sexual abuse in silence. The abused will not be told to walk the way of Matthew 18, but the church will treat the crime as a public sin. Mandated reporters will report to the state, so that the government is involved. The church will be informed at the right time so that the children of the church are protected from further abuse.

Patience: The church will take a long-term approach to the case. She will provide patient, compassionate care for the abused while they work through the trauma of the abuse. The church will also take a long-term approach to her work with the abuser, without hesitating to proceed through the steps of Christian discipline if he is impenitent.

4. We must learn the nature of true repentance for sexual abuse.

When a sexual abuser is exposed, he might confess to the abuse. He might say he is sorry. He might even shed many tears. And it would be easy for the church to say, “He’s sorry. We forgive him. Now the matter has to be dropped.”

This response does not reckon with the deeply ingrained sins of the abuser and the nature of true repentance for an abuser. An abuser is almost always a habitual liar and master manipulator. His apologies and tears are often part of the manipulation, hoping that he will get off easy. He will only confess to those things that can be conclusively proved, but to nothing more.

With respect to a sexual abuser, the church ought not immediately trust his expressions of repentance. There must be a lengthy probationary period in which the man’s repentance is tested. Since no man can judge the heart, there must be clear evidence in the man’s actions that show he is genuinely penitent. Part of the way in which he shows his penitence is by confessing fully and without qualification all the instances of and details of his sexual abuse, by understanding and verbalizing the extent of the damage caused, by actively (not reluctantly) seeking out accountability from those in authority, by siding with the victim rather than himself, and by accepting without complaint and self-pity all the consequences of his sins (including jail time and a strict policy of not being near any children).

The genuinely repentant person will be so broken by God that it is as if he is a totally different person than he was before.

Many authorities on the subject of abuse will say that real change in an abuser is almost impossible. We know, however, that the grace of God is powerful to change the worst of offenders, and we rejoice when genuine change takes place. But we do well to know the difficulties of real change,

and to test very carefully the abuser’s repentance.

Conclusion

God is a God who “executeth judgment for the oppressed” and “raiseth them that are bowed down,” which certainly includes the abused (Ps. 146:7-8). The church must do likewise: “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked” (Ps. 82:3-4). Especially for the sake of the little lambs loved by Jesus (Mark 9:42; 10:13-16; John 21:15). The church may not be guilty, like the Pharisees in Jesus’ day, of “omitt[ing] the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith” (Matt. 23:23).

When the church responds well to abuse, sin is handled properly and the hurting are cared for tenderly. This honors God and serves as a proper witness in this world.

Brothers and sisters in the PRCA, we are learning and must continue to learn these lessons with respect to the terrible evil of sexual abuse!

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Prof. Russell Dykstra, pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan

The abuser

The horror of sexual abuse starts with the sinner known as the perpetrator or the abuser. Every human being is a sinner with a depraved nature. Every sinner has particular sinful tendencies and depravities to which he or she is prone. The particular depravity of an abuser combines two evils. It is a delight in improper control of others with the added desire to exploit others for his or her sexual gratification. The specific sexual activity will vary from one abuser to the next, but manipulation and control are essential to the abuser.

What is sexual abuse? It is any type of sexual behavior or sexual contact that is accomplished through force, intimidation, violence, coercion, manipulation, threat, deception, or abuse of authority.¹ Another author adds: “Child sexual abuse is a horrific and selfish crime committed against an innocent child by someone older or more powerful. The perpetrator violates the adolescent for sexual stimulation.”² This author added to that: “however, sexual abuse is about abuse, not sex.” Probably anyone who was exploited by a sexual abuser would agree with that addition. This kind of behavior is not merely an individual satisfying sexual desires. It is abusive, destructive behavior beyond comprehension.

Profile of an abuser?

What most of us would like is a description of the abuser that is functional for identifying him or her. Alas, this is not possible. An abuser may be a fifteen-year-old boy playing with nephews or nieces. A perpetrator may be a strict and religious teacher in her forties. A predator may be a seventy-year-old elder in the church. An abuser can be a brother (or brothers), cousins, an uncle, a father, or a mother. Christian school teachers, babysitters, family friends, coaches, elders, and ministers have perpetrated sexual abuse. A seventeen year old on a date can abuse the weaker—pressing, pushing, manipulating, perhaps physically forcing her into sexual activity.

1 Adapted from Justin S. Holcomb and Lindsey A. Holcomb, *Rid of My Disgrace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 28.

2 Dawn Scott Jones, *When A Woman You Love Was Abused: A Husband's Guide to Helping Her Overcome Childhood Sexual Molestation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2012), 26.

Kinds of predators

For some clarity, we divide predators into four broad categories.

There are predators (usually male) who are filled with sexual thoughts and passions due to pornography and video games, who fantasize endlessly about having sex with a child. Such a man may, in a fit of passion, kidnap a child and do his evil with violence. Such are responsible for fewer than 10% of the cases of sexual abuse. These predators are usually teenage boys or adult males.

Second, sexual abusers are found within families. It is estimated that some 34% of sexual abuse occurs in the home. Brothers or sisters sexually abuse their siblings. Some actually invite cousins or school friends to join in abuse of siblings. In addition, fathers (and more rarely mothers) abuse their own children. Some abuse occurs when babysitters care for children, whether family member or friend of the family.

Abuse within a family is very difficult to predict and/or discover. In homes where the father is the perpetrator, he is often a very strict authoritarian who brooks no opposition. We must be fully aware of the possibility of all these forms of sexual sin in our own homes. This is not an “out there” problem. This is a sin found in Protestant Reformed homes. It has happened. It is happening.

Third, our concern is the unsuspected predator who does his or her work in a cunning way, taking control of a child or adolescent, having an open, public relationship with the child, and doing his/her evil deeds in secret. Such a person lives a lie, a double life. He deliberately deceives people all around him.

First, he creates a public persona for himself. He or she is kind, friendly, helpful, generous, and not interested in sex. She may be extremely religious. He creates the impression that he would never commit *any* crime, let alone *this* one. In short: he/she creates the kind of impression on people that *this person* is the LAST one you or I would suspect of sexual abuse.

Second, the predator puts himself into a position to be around children or vulnerable individuals. Some of the best places are schools and churches. An ideal position is some ministry of the church. Other desirable po-

sitions for predators are coaches of children's teams and camp counselors. An abuser will show himself/herself to be a friend who likes children, interacts with them, enjoys taking them to ballgames and other activities.

Third, he or she will make a special friendship with one particular child. She gains the child's trust and even love. He may have a number of them in different families or groups, but he focuses on certain children. More on this later.

A fourth predator is one who uses his position of power to prey on vulnerable women. While this can happen in any institution where there is power—business, education, the military, sports—our primary concern here is in the school and the church. In the church, the abuser is a pastor who uses his position to exploit members of the congregation who come to him for help in their troubles. In the schools, the abuser is the teacher who has been hired to stand in the place of the parent. It should be evident that in the Protestant Reformed Churches, where the office of minister of the Word is held in high regard, and where teachers are trusted and respected, these are areas where we are quite unprepared to detect or prevent sexual abuse.

You and I, unless we have been closely involved in sexual abuse and are of the ultra-suspicious group, will not identify a predator before he is caught. That is because a 'successful' predator is a close friend, a family member, or a servant of the church or school, and respected by almost all. That is to say, he is a grandfather who publicly loves to hold his granddaughters on his lap. She is a teacher so religious and strict that no one could ever bring accusations of sexual impropriety. He is a teen that is great with kids, loves to coach soccer, and take his team members out for a ride or a camping trip. He is a longtime friend of the family who golfs with the dad regularly. He is a doctor, professional as well as kindly. He is a cousin who stays overnight, and the kids love him. The abuser is your husband. Your wife. Your son. We do not suspect these people.

Often when such a predator is confronted and accused, he does not have to defend himself. Others defend him. "He would *never* do anything like that!"

You see, an exact profile of a sexual abuser, a profile you can use to identify him or her and thus protect your children, is not possible to construct. There are, however, patterns of behavior that can be delineated. That we will do.

How they work

Predators gain access to children and then prepare the child in a process known as *grooming*. (Keep in

mind that, although the following description speaks of "children," this must not be limited to those under thirteen; some abusers prey on teens, and some exploit vulnerable adults.)

In this deliberate process, the abuser selects a particular child. (Understand that an abuser may well have many victims at the same time, but we focus on just one now.) An abuser is looking for a child that is open to his or her manipulation. Understand that it could be any 'ordinary' child. At the same time, the abuser may find an easier target in a child with a troubled life. It works into his scheme well if the child has been caught lying. He may look for a child in need of care and affection, preferably a child that is also very trusting and easy to gain her affection, or perhaps a child who likes to please adults. It may be a child in a family where the parents are too occupied with other matters (anything from jobs to sports to church work) to pay close attention to their children, or parents who do not have well established, open lines of communication with their children.

In this grooming, the predator begins to cultivate a closer relationship with the child. She gives the child special attention. In school, the child is obviously the 'teacher's pet.' Or she is the predator's favorite one in a family. Predators look for ways to do special things with that individual child—alone time. A predator will test the child for what he or she will tell others, say, parents, by doing something fairly innocent with the child and observing whether the child will keep it a *secret*. If the child does, he can continue to develop the relationship.

In the grooming process, the predator continues to press toward sexual control. In public he might rub her back, slap her backside, tickle, and give quick hugs. The abuser manipulates their public activity so that he can continue the control/abuse in plain sight, and people will explain it away. Privately, there are special hugs, and kisses that get longer. He will testify of his 'love' to the child. He will tell her how this is all for her good. Alternatively, he may snarl at her that no one else will love her. Perhaps he introduces her to pornography to further prepare her. He may remind her that "this is our secret," but he can manipulate in such a way that it is not always necessary even to say that. If the child co-operates, it leads to sexual rubbing and further activity.

Meanwhile, the abuser is also grooming the parents of this child. The predator redoubles efforts to impress them with his/her respectability, kindness, friendliness, and helpfulness. She will make it plain how special their son/daughter is to her. If possible, the abuser will go out with the parents or family to a restaurant or on an outing. He is deliberately building trust, earning respect. He wants their complete confidence. All the

while he is planning to use their child for his devious sexual pleasure.

The abuser continues the grooming process with the child or adolescent. He gives assurance of his 'love,' and how special the child is. And as the relationship progresses, he uses the sexual feelings aroused to confuse the child further—"It feels good, right?" He may bribe with gifts, money, and treats. He may also threaten the same child with physical harm. He may use blackmail, threatening to tell the parents about what has already been done (their secrets). He may well heap the horrible responsibility on the child not to destroy the predator: "If you tell, I will lose my position." Or, "The police will take me to jail and you will never see me again." Or, "It will destroy our family."

A minister who exploits young girls or women, or a teacher who abuses young children or young adults, follows the same basic pattern of grooming, adapted to the situation and to the age of the victim. The added element is the power inherent in the position.

It is important to recognize that a sexual abuser lives a lie. He is comfortable with lying. She has managed to get away with horrible things for quite some time using lies. When he is caught, therefore, he will continue to lie. He will not admit anything more than can be clearly proven. And even then he will deny and deny and deny. Tears of 'repentance' are not to be accepted at face value. An abuser must confess his lies, his motives, his grooming, his devious intents, and practices. That admission will include not merely this one individual whom he or she abused, but all of them. Until all that happens, his confession is not genuine.

Climate/prevention

There is a certain climate in which sexual abuse flourishes. In some groups or families it might rightly be described as a 'culture'—a very wrong, anti-scriptural culture involving sex. In such a family, the attitude toward sexual conduct is expressed in the saying, "Boys will be boys." Their sexual misbehavior is ignored or dismissed. In such a culture, boys believe it is entirely acceptable to call girls—even their own sisters—"sluts." They use filthy speech that degrades girls and manipulates them for sexual activity. In such a culture, the presumption is that a 'real man' must have his sexual desires satisfied. This is an absolute, a given, in any relationship between a male and a female. Men with such an attitude can even conjure up biblical support. Paul taught the church in Corinth that sex is a debt owed to the husband and commanded them, "Defraud ye not...." This is then justification for forcing sex on women, and if denied, seeking it elsewhere.

Such men ignore the entire context in which Paul writes of the relationship between a husband and a wife. Worse, they view sexual activity as a taking for oneself, rather than a giving of oneself for the blessing of the spouse. All abusers have a totally wrong view of God's precious gift of sexual intimacy. Such an evil culture fosters sexual abusers.

Apart even from such wrong attitudes concerning sexual intimacy, conservative Reformed churches and schools must recognize that they are at serious risk of providing a safe haven for sexual abusers. We emphasize to our children that parents and teachers are to be obeyed for the Lord's sake. We preach the biblical admonition to honor those in authority, including elders, and to give double honor to those who labor in the Word, our ministers. Christian love demands that we not be suspicious of each other. But the trouble is that this is exactly a place, a climate, for abusers to perform their evil undetected for a lengthy period. A place where the victim's mouth is closed not only by shame, but also because "No one will believe me." And, "It must be me, I am at fault."

We stand before a choice. Sexual abuse has occurred, and, to a limited extent, has been exposed. We can close our eyes and hope it will go away. We can continue on with a lack of knowledge and understanding of the issue. We can pursue policies that will only protect ministers, elders, and teachers from false charges. But then our children will be left vulnerable and exposed to wicked abusers. This choice is intolerable. And it will bring God's righteous judgment.

We will not eliminate the sin of sexual abuse in our churches, homes, and schools. It was a sin condemned already in Old Testament Israel. It has surfaced or lain under the surface all through the ages of the church. But sexual abuse rages today in a society obsessed with both sex and power. We must stand against it. We must make it as difficult as possible for a predator to move freely. We must be on guard. We cannot and may not be suspicious of all members of the church but, on the other hand, we may never say or think, "*He* (she) would *never*..." We must cultivate open relationships with our children and educate them. We must have policies that will protect the vulnerable and direct us to react biblically to help those who have been abused. This includes naming known offenders in our churches and schools, as well as not avoiding the use of law enforcement. In addition, a huge educational campaign must be conducted in all our churches and schools. This special issue is a small start.

Truly, may God give us wisdom and courage to do what He requires.



Rev. William Langerak, pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan

Offending the little ones of Christ

And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

Mark 9:42

Those who harm little children offend them. This offense is a “scandal,” which is the original word Jesus used. To offend (or scandalize) is deliberately to entrap or trip someone so they are harmed, wounded, or destroyed. To sexually abuse a child is among the most horrible, destructive, and life-altering of offenses. And when that child believes in Jesus, indeed it would be better that the offender were drowned by a millstone necklace, because this is a “scandal” in the church of Christ, and Christ Himself bought the little body and soul that was violated, harmed, and wounded.

Effects of child sexual abuse (CSA) vary depending on several factors including the type, frequency, and duration of abuse; age when it occurred; personality and emotional resources of the victim; relationship to the abuser; location of the abuse; and how others respond to disclosure. The most common effects are: 1) Reliving the abuse—nightmares or flashbacks, often with pain, nausea, sweating, or trembling and triggered by sights, sounds, smells, or touch; 2) Avoiding people, places, and things that trigger memories; 3) Hyperarousal—enhanced perception or paranoia of danger, distrust, difficulty focusing, relaxing, or sleeping; 4) Dissociation—mental disconnection from thoughts, feelings, memories, or surroundings; 5) Lost, altered, or confused memories, and fractured sense of time due to dissociation; 6) Difficulty regulating emotions; 7) Difficulty with relationships; 8) False self-analysis—guilt, shame, worthlessness, and self-blaming for the abuse; 9) Defiant, risky, promiscuous, or self-destructive behavior; suicidal thoughts; 10) Drug or alcohol addictions; 11) Diagnosis of mental or physical problems such as eating disorders, psychosis, ADD, bi-polar, diabetes, headaches, gastrointestinal issues, gynecological issues, stroke, and heart disease.

I do not have space to explain these symptoms, except to say it mainly relates to the nature of childhood development, which trauma easily, significantly, and permanently alters. Nor do I have space to adequately relate the varied and hellish suffering of victims, each a book itself. I also do not have space to convince those who dismiss or belittle these experiences as merely personality traits, bad choices or habits, psychological nonsense, willful sin, or anything else victims can just forget, stop, and get over. This is the opinion of the ignorant, inconsiderate, or incompetent if a counselor or pastor. I am harsh, because I have been all three. Best is that you hear from survivors themselves. Over my ministry, I have heard over two dozen survivors. Their abusers vary: Neighbors, strangers, relatives (fathers, siblings, uncles, cousins), and those in authority (teachers, elders, pastors). Their abuse, experiences, ages, backgrounds, and healing also varies. Most are in the PRC, are women, and suffered from the above effects of CSA to varying degrees. Some courageously and kindly agreed to write of their experience. Please hear them. To understand and help we must first listen.

For me, the sexual abuse was not traumatic as a child. My dad would touch my private parts while horsing around and pretend it was normal fun. The problem is that this made it seem normal when others touched me. Before the age of 13, three different men touched me inappropriately. My dad also sexually touched my sister. She told my mom, who basically blamed her for enticing my dad. So I decided I better not say a word! As I learned in church about sexual sins, I began to feel like a disgusting, filthy, worthless person nobody would ever want to marry. I tried to find my worth in God. And for a while life seemed good—nobody else touched me, nobody knew my secret. But on a date, a boy did things no one ever did before. I was shocked, sore, and embarrassed so I didn’t say anything. This experience was more traumatic than the others. The feelings of being ruined and disgusting multiplied. So I let other

boyfriends abuse me, verbally, physically, emotionally, and sexually. It was pretty much all I knew. In Bible study and counseling, I came to realize my value and worth are not in myself, but are in Christ, who removes my sins and dirty stains as far as the east is from the west. God sees me beautiful and white as snow. So I decided not to dwell on the past but live as a new person, valuable and worthy because of Christ's love for me. I continued to keep silent and didn't even tell my husband. We had children and I determined never to let my girls be abused by anyone. I never left them alone with my dad even though I thought his behavior was long over. Then, on Mother's Day, when the family was at my parents, my worst nightmare came true. My dad, again pretending it was a fun game, touched my girls sexually. I was devastated. How could this happen? Until my dad abused my girls, I never realized how predators are so sneaky and able to tell who is an easy target. I also didn't realize that, though my dad's actions seemed insignificant compared to what that high school boy did, it had a huge impact on how vulnerable I became.

My abuse happened in my home as a young child, mostly in the basement. To this day, I do not feel comfortable in basements. I can't even be in my own basement, except to clean it. My parents always sat upstairs in the living room, unaware of the abuse in the basement. I wondered so many times why they didn't come down to help me. Now as a parent, I have difficulty sitting in my own living room. As a child, I feared someone would come into my room at night, so I slept completely cocooned in blankets, with only my mouth and nose exposed so I could breathe. I never realized this as odd until college roommates pointed it out. I felt most safe away from home. However, that is also when I felt safe enough to let my frustration out. At school, I guess as a cry for help, I was angry and naughty—causing fights, disrespectful to authority. I used every opportunity not to be home and signed up for every extra-curricular activity offered: choir, band, speech class, soccer, cross country, track, cheerleading, music. My family saw me “thriving.” They didn't know I was trying to escape home. All this makes being a stay-at-home mom very difficult. I don't feel comfortable at home. To suppress that feeling, I clean, cook, organize, and re-organize. I have many OCD-like tendencies, and make many lists to feel like I've accomplished a lot. Another way I coped was to live the opposite of my abuser. My abuser lived a troubled life: Abused drugs and alcohol, had a child out of wedlock, divorced shortly after marriage, and couldn't hold a job. So I, for example, refused to touch

alcohol or drugs. But not because I wanted to live a holy life. It was because with every fiber in my being I *would not resemble* my abuser. To this day I fear failing because that would make me like him.

Life as a survivor is complex. Every day I'm faced with effects of the abuse. It's like two different lives. On the one hand, I seem normal, did normal childhood things, graduated, became a church member, had normal jobs, got married, and am a 'normal' stay-at-home mom. But there is this 'other life' that is a part of me. The two years of my life that I would give anything to have gone from my memory, have instead affected every single part of my life. I can do laundry and suddenly relive the abuse as if I were 14. A song or car freshener immediately brings me into my abuser's car. An unfinished basement or cold upstairs room brings me back to the abuse. It's everywhere. It's in everything. It's learning how to be calm when I drop off our kids at school. It's fighting the panic of them joining the basketball team or taking piano lessons. It's constantly reassuring myself that not every teacher or coach will abuse our kids. It's learning how to breathe through blinding fear when our child gets in a car with a driver's ed instructor. It's not being able to stay focused in the worship service because I worry about kids walking out by themselves. It's the guilt of not being able to show more affection to my husband, daughters, sisters, or mom. Because the dirty feeling of sexual abuse by someone of the same sex, who called herself a friend, who my family and I trusted, never disappears. It's fighting the churning anxiety of being alone with anyone, the panic of letting my kids go anywhere without me, the overwhelming need to control every aspect of my life and my kids' lives because if I don't, then something bad will happen. It's holding my breath because I always see dangers in every situation, knowing that abuse happens not only behind closed doors, but right out in plain sight. It's a lifetime of learning that love and affection is not a disgusting thing.

I am a professional at forcing myself to do the next task—put my feet on the floor, get up—so I can cope under depression and stress. This strategy has worked for many years. But as I deal with the trauma over time, my strategies become less effective. They take a lot of mental energy. I think one of the biggest struggles is we cope alone. I might just jot down my thoughts and send them. But I don't want to burden you. I still am hesitant to reach out to my own pastor. I don't have the emotional reserves right now to deal with conflict, not agreeing with pastor, having my feelings challenged. I

don't know if this will occur, but I have a hard time getting over the emotions of my last pastoral counseling. Right now I need a place where I feel safe. I try to be in control. It is the 'fail proof' coping mechanism I have developed over 25 years. I can't be in counseling where someone tries to rip the reigns of control out of my hands. It leaves me shaking and fleeing back into my safe, dark corner. I need someone to slowly guide me, and work beside me to take down the scaffolding I've built and build a healthier, sturdier structure. But I also don't need sermons and Bible passages thrown at me. I need to be anchored to the Cross. I need comfort and love, all of which come from God's Word. You provided an environment where I could be vulnerable, let down my guard a bit, and not be in complete control, a safe environment. And this has opened up a pathway that beckons me. A pathway that is frightening, so scary, filled with horrible memories, really a nightmare. And to choose to walk that path again is daunting. I know the Lord has much growth and sanctification left for me. And I realize that there is still so much pain in my heart. I sit here weeping as I type this. This is me writing this. There is a little girl in me that was forever lost because a monster chose to abuse her. There is a tender-hearted, deeply loving mother who makes decisions for her children, always with the dark backdrop of her abuse. There is a wife whose abuse is shaping her husband. There is God who holds this dear soul and cares for her more than I can ever imagine. I still want to run in the other direction but I know God's hand is guiding me.

The spiritual damage my abuser inflicted on me is immense. After the abuse ended, I built walls, stopped trusting people, stopped trusting God. He, after all, permitted the abuse to happen, and He is everywhere present. If God watched the abuse take place and let it continue for two years, I was not going to trust Him ever again. I still went to church, learned my catechism, and enjoyed understanding doctrine, but it was not personal. God was a distant Being to be learned about. But He didn't love me. He didn't care about my pain, He didn't protect me. I developed unhealthy, sinful coping mechanisms. I was a fake. I was not going to let anyone in to see my pain, my shame, and filthy disgust I felt. But after 25 years of suffering in silence, God broke me down to nothing. He brought me to the end of attempting to rely on my own strength to get through each day. He brought me through what was to be a very long, dark period to show me the Truth. I had no desire to carry on. I wanted out. He showed me Himself. It

was as if He took my chin and continually lifted my face up to Him every day. He used means graciously to bring a measure of healing and health, means which included family, church, an understanding pastor and his wife, a Christian psychologist, a psychiatrist, an inpatient mental health facility, medicine, and encouragement and prayers of so many people.

Healing is an extremely painful process. Temporarily it's easier to live in denial or minimize what happened. I've found hope and peace in acknowledging the past and its effects on me. Understanding the abuse from a biblical perspective was worth the exhausting effort to press through the pain. I found *The Wounded Heart* by Dan Allender to be the most helpful. I found Rachel Den Hollander's *What's a Girl Worth* to be most helpful in giving me a godly attitude and purpose in addressing and disclosing the abuse. She emphasizes the need to grieve over the pain and loss experienced. I have found that grieving over the sin guards from bitterness, keeps focus on God's glory and seeking the good of His church. God has given us Christian fellowship for a reason. Get recommendations for good books, and find the right people to walk through the healing with you. Don't rush, and don't give up if the first book you read or if the first friend or counselor you reach out to isn't a good fit. Remember that the God who sent His own dear Son to save you from your sins and make you His own precious child will not desert you and leave you without hope and comfort.

The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van der Kolk accurately explains what trauma does to the body and mind. There isn't a day I haven't suffered these consequences. I've been in and out of doctors' offices for the past 10 years, had countless scopes, tests, and surgeries. I've been diagnosed with POTS, Eosinophilic Esophagitis, Ehlers-Danlos, Raynaud's, IBS, Fibromyalgia, horrible allergies and eczema. No underlying cause has been discovered. While genetics can play a role, no one else in my family suffers these health issues. And I am convinced my abuse has contributed to these diseases rearing their ugly head.

When my abuse was brought to light, my consistory acted quickly and contacted the authorities because my abuser was a teacher in the schools. However, the way my abuser's consistory handled it caused further damage. They rushed through the process without ever asking me a single question about the abuse and

allowed the abuser to control what was said. They used Scripture passages on forgiveness to pressure me, and ignored my attempt to show them their actions covered the abuse, which is dangerous for members and their children. This is devastating and has had lasting effects on my ability to trust, especially those in leadership. It makes church hard. Sundays are mentally, spiritually, and emotionally exhausting. While I give thanks to God for preserving the truths of Scripture in our churches, it tears me up knowing some church leaders have hidden the truth of sexual abusers in our midst, consequently putting children in danger, not showing care for the abuser's soul, and inflicting further damage on survivors. God calls us to glorify Him in all that we do, not just on paper or in our theology from the pulpit, but in our actions as well.

I don't know if I have any long-term trauma from these

experiences. I don't remember being angry at God but did wonder, Why me and why did God allow so many bad things to happen to me? "Where was God when I was being abused" was the strangest question I ever was asked in a counseling session. I was not prepared for it, but my answer was, "He was right there with me, seeing the evil that was done to me." He must have been preparing me to see how dirty I am because of sin and how He takes all that sin, takes my punishment, and presents me white as snow to our heavenly Father. If my story can help at least one person, then that is also part of why I had to go through everything I did. Because of the disgusting sins I experienced and the awful things I grew up to do in sinful behavior, I am in awe of such a merciful God saving a wretched sinner like me. This is why I can move forward and live my life not stuck on the bad things that happened to me, but on the hope I have in Christ.



Rev. Nathan Decker, pastor of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan

Church leaders and sexual abuse

Introduction

Sexual abuse is present in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The recent proof is two public cases: a minister deposed and multi-term elder excommunicated for his impenitence with regard to this sin. The overwhelming evidence is the many victims and survivors in the PRC, who were sexually abused by PR family, teachers, or fellow church members. Why an article on the role of the local PR church? Because this evil is among us, and the church is called to deal with sexual abuse justly and wisely.

The subject assigned to me is broad: the church and sexual abuse. It is, therefore, impossible to touch on every aspect, such as responding to initial allegations, understanding signs that may indicate one is an abuser or abused, helping the spouses and families of those who have been hurt, or drawing up policies for prevention and response. I have chosen to narrow the article's scope to the church's calling toward the perpetrator of abuse. In treating this, I will touch only briefly on protecting the congregation and caring for those abused.

The calling of leaders generally

I cannot overstate how important it is for pastors and elders to have a basic understanding of the dynamics of sexual abuse. Expertise is not required. A little knowledge gained can go a long way in wisely dealing with this sin. Let reading this special edition of the *Standard Bearer* be only a beginning. While not all resources are trustworthy, many are. Always reading with discretion, we must avail ourselves of them to mature in our understanding.

Knowing the facets of this sin helps guide the church down the proper path in handling cases of sexual abuse. Ignorance, on the other hand, can have devastating effects. I will illustrate through one example. All must understand that sexual abuse is almost never a momentary lapse in judgment or a single lamentable fall into sin, such as David's sin with Bathsheba. Instead, sexual abuse is a proper work of the Devil because it is based upon a pattern of deceit. Sexual abusers are often master manipulators of the victim, family, and community. They present themselves as godly to gain the trust of others to carry

out their evil in secret. If elders do not understand the dynamic of deceit, it could lead to the devastating consequences of being manipulated, automatically taking a perpetrator's word without a thorough investigation, or accepting a false confession. This is to say nothing of how a failure to understand this dynamic would potentially affect the care of the victim and the protection of the congregation. In short, the church's proper response to sexual abuse is dependent, in part, upon an adequate level of understanding the sin's dynamics.

Furthermore, from a general perspective, the church's calling toward abusers is to bring them the gospel of Jesus Christ. The church, officially through the office of elder and organically through members of the congregation, has the sacred duty to call an abuser to repentance. More than anything else, a perpetrator needs Jesus Christ. He or she needs the grace of forgiveness found in Him and the power by His Spirit to be delivered from the bondage of this sin. Upon an abuser who remains impenitent, the elders with the authority of Christ must exercise the key of Christian discipline.

The calling to deal with sexual abuse as public sin

Because of space limitations, I will develop one central point: the importance of the church treating sexual abuse as a public, gross sin. To view sexual abuse as such requires that the consistory inform the congregation of the perpetrator's name and the nature of the sin at the appropriate time and in a wise manner, while protecting the victim of the abuse through this process. The language of "public, gross sin" comes from the articles in our Church Order on Christian discipline. That sexual abuse is a *gross sin* is indisputable; it renders "the perpetrator infamous before the world" (Church Order, Article 80). That it is to be considered a *public sin* must be explained.

Sexual abuse should be judged as public sin not because the public sees the perpetrator sexually abuse his or her victim. Nothing could be further from the truth. An abuser operates in darkness and secrecy. What makes sexual abuse a public sin is its consequences. Other sins are like this. Sex out of wedlock that results in pregnancy is not public as to the sin itself. The result is what makes it public, namely, a pregnancy. Similarly, the consequences of sexual abuse, two in particular, require that the church treat it in a public manner.

The first consequence is that sexual abuse is a crime, which may result in the public knowledge of the sin because of imprisonment or being put upon a state sex-offender list. This requires that the church deal with the sin in a public manner. The fact that sexual abuse is a criminal offense also calls attention to the necessity of knowing state laws regarding sexual-abuse reporting,

especially for those who are mandatory reporters. One transgresses the fifth commandment when state reporting laws are ignored.

What about a case in which an abuser is not convicted of a crime because it falls under the statute of limitations? Must it be treated as a public sin? This author's conviction is that it must, on account of a second consequence, namely, the elder's calling to protect the flock of God. I will demonstrate briefly by means of a comparison. The wise consequence for someone who walked in bondage to alcohol is that their access to alcohol must be carefully guarded. No one should dispute this. Similarly, the wise consequence for someone who has walked in the sin of sexual abuse is that their access to potential targets of abuse must be highly guarded. No one should dispute this either when the nature of the sin is understood. The only way to do this is by wisely informing the congregation of the sin in which he or she walked. To announce the name and sin publicly is not meant to punish the abuser. It is not meant to heap shame upon shame. It is not meant to label a man or woman as an abuser forever. Instead, it is done out of love for God and love for the church. The consistory shows love for the perpetrator of abuse by seeking to keep him or her from ever walking in the sin again. And the elders demonstrate charity for Christ's lambs and sheep by striving, to the best of their ability, to keep them safe from the evil of sexual abuse.

Let's make this practical with some questions. Would the knowledge that a man or woman has sexually abused someone in the past, even one who has shown themselves to be penitent, influence how you would allow your child to interact with such a person? Would you let him or her be alone with your son or daughter? Would you permit such a person to teach your child in a class, coach your child in a sport, chaperone your child at an outing? Would you ask one who sexually abused others to babysit your children? To all these questions the loving parent would answer, "No." This answer is given not out of hatred for the one who formerly walked in the sin of sexual abuse. Rather, it arises out of an understanding of the strength of a sinful nature and the constant temptation of the Devil. It also comes from the godly and loving desire to keep all persons involved, the perpetrator included, out of a dangerous situation. However, all of these scenarios are possible if the church does not regard sexual abuse as a public, gross sin.

Three additional points arise out of and are related to this main idea.

The first is that a genuinely penitent man or woman will accept willingly all the consequences of their sin. The repentant sexual abuser will submit to not being in

positions of leadership, receiving the sentence imposed by the state (prison time or otherwise), being on a state sexual-offender registry, being restricted in attending church functions, and this: having their sin exposed publicly for their own and the congregation's protection. A man or woman who understands this sin's heinous and hurtful nature, and who is truly sorry, will submit to all of these as reasonable, wise, and even necessary results. The repentant abuser may need some time and patient explanation to help accept such painful consequences, but if truly repentant, he or she will, in the end, submit to them.

Second, a victim of sexual abuse should not be required to follow the path of Matthew 18. Matthew 18 lays out how to deal with private offenses between individuals in the church. A victim of sexual abuse must never have to call their abuser to repentance privately. Rather, they must know that the elders of the church stand ready and willing in mercy to help them in their suffering and in justice to deal with their abuser.

That a victim of abuse must not follow the way of Matthew 18 should be evident on the surface. Would you ever tell a young child, adolescent, or teenager who is abused by an authority figure—whether parent, grandparent, teacher, coach, elder, or pastor—to confront him or her privately to issue the call to repent? To ask the question is to answer it. Never! To require this of an abused lamb is to throw such a person into the very situation that they so desperately want to escape. Nor should that ever be mandated ten or twenty or thirty years after the actual abuse occurred, when the Holy Spirit prompts a victim of abuse to go to the church for help and to inform the elders of the sin that took place. Often it is only after many years have passed that a victim of abuse is ready and willing to share with another what took place. The abuser's power over a victim continues long after the actual abuse. The abused may have paralyzing fear of their abuser many years later. Even the thought of confronting their abuser can be crippling. For the important reasons of maintaining the safety and welfare of the victim, he or she must never be required, even years after the abuse occurred, to confront their abuser. There may be a time to do so, with help from others, but never initially by following the way of Matthew 18. Let those who have been abused, both young and old, know that they have safe recourse directly to the congregation's leadership.

The church that exposes perpetrators publicly to hold them accountable and protect the congregation sends loudly and clearly the message that the covenant community is a safe place! Oh, how we need to trumpet this word in our public preaching and teaching and consistory work to those who have been abused!

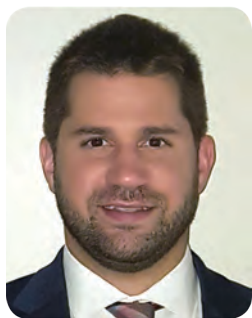
The third point is that dealing with a perpetrator of sexual abuse in this manner can be used by God to help the abused and their families as they walk the path of healing. The church that exposes perpetrators publicly to hold them accountable and protect the congregation sends loudly and clearly the message that the covenant community is a safe place! Oh, how we need to trumpet this word in our public preaching and teaching and consistory work to those who have been abused! Sadly, treating sexual abuse as a private matter between two

parties sends the seriously wrong and damaging message that the church is a place of refuge, not for victims, but perpetrators. Those who have been abused understand secrecy and silence. And so also do abusers, who operate in secrecy and use many different means to keep their victims silent. And if exposed, impenitent abusers will always seek to keep the circle of those who know as small as possible, often to control the narrative, minimize what happened, and maintain control over their victim.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I ask the members of the PRC, especially her leaders, to reflect honestly before God on how we have dealt with sexual abuse in the PRC. Consider this from every perspective—in working toward the repentance of perpetrators and subsequently holding them truly accountable; in protecting congregations from this evil; in providing support for abuse victims and their families; in cultivating an atmosphere in which abuse survivors can seek help in their suffering with the good hope that they will be believed, supported, understood, and protected.

The sad refrain found in literature written from a Christian perspective on this subject is that the church sweeps the abuse under the proverbial rug, protects the perpetrator, and consequently causes more hardships for victims. I ask, praying that we examine ourselves honestly: Does that describe how the PRC have dealt with sexual abuse? Where it does, may God humble and, if at all possible, right any wrongs of the past. As we go forward, by God's grace may we be faithful to His word in Micah 6:8 as it would apply to the church's role in dealing with sexual abuse: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"



Rev. Erik Guichelaar, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin

Resources related to sexual abuse

For this article I was asked to provide a list of resources that would further educate the reader on various topics related to sexual abuse.

The number one resource I would recommend when dealing with the subject of sexual abuse would be your fellow church member who has been personally affected by sexual abuse (in one way or another), and who (for whatever reason) has a passion for the subject and has educated themselves on the subject. *Listen* to them. Truly *listen* to them. *Learn* from them. And cultivate within yourself a humble, teachable spirit. We are much more naïve than we think.

Many, if not all, of the resources I am going to recommend below are resources that were first recommended to me. There should be something here for everyone.

A good place to start

First, I want to do some name-dropping. Search these names, check out the websites, listen to the podcasts, read the books, and you will have a good start: www.netgrace.org, Diane Langberg, Dr. Justin and Lindsey Holcomb, and Dr. Dan B. Allender.

The first resource I would recommend is www.netgrace.org. If you are looking for books, go to the website, click on the link “Learn More,” and then click on the tab “Books,” and right there you have fifteen recommended books on a wide range of topics related to sexual abuse. In addition, each of the books has a helpful summary outline describing the contents of the book. Examples of recommended books include the following:

- *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches and Ministries* by Boz Tchividjian and Shira Berkovitz
- *What the Bible Says to Abuse Survivors and Those Who Hurt Them* by Victor Vieth
- *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* by Diane Langberg
- *Predators (Pedophiles, Rapists, and Other Sex Offenders): Who they are, How they operate, and How we can protect ourselves and our children* by Anna C. Salter.

Note: I have not read (or even handled) all these books, but I have handled about half the books on the list, and I trust the website. If you want to see a table of contents, try searching for the book on Amazon.

If a *book* sounds a little intimidating, instead of clicking on the “Books” tab, click on the “Resources” tab, and there you will find all kinds of articles and videos related to sexual abuse. Some of the titles include:

- “How Should the Church Respond to Abusers?” by Diane Langberg
- “The Health Impacts of Abuse” by Pete Singer
- “Known Offenders: Five Things to Know” by Zane Hart
- “Walls of Silence: Protecting the Institution over the Individual.”

The website is packed full of all kinds of resources; all you have to do is search. One video I would draw your attention to is “The Imbalance and Exploitation of Power: A Recipe for Abuse” (or: “Boz Tchividjian at Covenant College”). This video is a recording of a chapel speech given to college students, and I would encourage any college students (or their parents) who are reading this article to take the time to listen to it. If you cannot find the video, search for it on YouTube. Anything by Boz Tchividjian is going to be worth watching.

The second resource I would recommend, perhaps because I am most familiar with her material, is Diane Langberg. I have read a few of her books and watched a few of her videos and find her to be excellent (you will also find her material on the [netgrace.org](http://www.netgrace.org) website mentioned earlier). She specializes in trauma but she also has books on sexual abuse and clergy abuse, which are obviously intimately related to the subject of trauma. If you want to help a friend or loved one, I would recommend her. In her book, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores*, she has two chapters, “Understanding Sexual Abuse” and “Sexual Abuse in Christian Organizations” that are good for anyone who has an interest in the subject. You could also check out her website—www.dianelangberg.com—click on the “Resource” link, and go from there.

Or, you could simply go to YouTube and search “Diane Langberg understanding sexual abuse” to find videos on these subjects. I do not think you will be disappointed with purchasing any book with her name on it (or borrowing it off Hoopla, if possible).

As a side note, resources on trauma and complex-trauma must not be neglected in our studies. It is a crucial component of appreciating the devastating effects of sexual abuse. If you do not want to damage a victim/survivor of sexual abuse further, spend some time on this subject.

A third name I would highly recommend is Dr. Justin and Lindsey Holcomb. This is the name I would recommend for parents who want to protect their younger children. The Holcombs are the authors of the book, *Rid of My Disgrace: Hope and Healing for Victims of Sexual Assault*, reviewed in the February 15, 2022 *Standard Bearer* by Rev. J. Engelsma (there is a companion workbook available, for those who may be interested). They are also the authors of the children’s book, *God Made All of Me: A Book to Help Children Protect Their Bodies*.

If you are a parent and do not want to purchase the book right away, I strongly recommend watching the following YouTube video: “Justin and Lindsey Holcomb ‘Things Parents & Caregivers Can Do To Protect Children.’” This is a video that all parents should take the time to watch. I shared it with my congregation about two months ago. Parents should even consider sharing the video with their own teenagers (Justin and Lindsey’s own daughter was sitting in on the presentation). Parents have the calling to give sex education to their children—and this is a tool that can help you cultivate the right atmosphere in your home. In the society and culture in which our children are growing up, they need their parents to be a help to them. You help them cross the street—why would you not help them protect their bodies (and souls) from predators? Also look up the article, “10 Ways to Teach Your Child the Skills to Prevent Sexual Abuse,” by Natasha Daniels from the website *Child Mind Institute*.

A fourth name I would recommend for everyone, but perhaps particularly for those who are the victims of sexual abuse and those who have the calling to counsel them, is Dr. Dan B. Allender. His book *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse* is considered a classic on the subject (written in 1990). He also wrote *Healing the Wounded Heart: The Heartache of Sexual Abuse and the Hope of Transformation* (which has a companion workbook). These two books are similar in outline to another book for victims of sexual abuse, *On the Threshold of Hope:*

Opening the Door to Healing for Survivors of Sexual Abuse (written in 1999, and which also has a companion workbook), by Diane Langberg.

Allender’s *The Wounded Heart* is divided into three main sections: 1) The Dynamics of Abuse; 2) The Damage of Abuse; 3) Prerequisites for Growth. Langberg’s book has a similar outline: 1) Approaching the Subject of Sexual Abuse; 2) Dealing with the Abuse; 3) What was Damaged in the Abuse?; 4) What Does Healing Look Like? Both authors emphasize the idea of living in the truth as a pathway for healing. In my opinion, Diane Langberg’s book is going to take a gentler, warmer approach, which may be more helpful for some readers, while Allender’s book will tend to be more blunt, which may be more helpful for other readers.

For those wanting to understand how grooming for sexual abuse “works,” a good place to start would be chapter four of Dan Allender’s *The Wounded Heart*. As he summarizes, “Sexual abuse often follows a typical sequence of stages: (1) development of intimacy and secrecy; (2) enjoyment of physical touch that appears appropriate; (3) sexual abuse proper (physical contact or psychological interaction); and (4) maintenance of the abuse and the shameful secret through threats and privileges” (p. 57). His explanation of these four stages is helpful for understanding the predatory nature of abusers. In that connection, see Deepak Reju’s book and Voyle A. Glover’s book below for additional resources on the tactics of predators.

On this subject there are other names to which I have been exposed, such as Rachel Den Hollander. Her book, *What is a Girl Worth?: My Story of Breaking the Silence and Exposing the Truth about Larry Nassar and USA Gymnastics*, comes highly recommended. But the above-mentioned four names/websites would be where I would start.

Other resources

Sexual abuse has many related aspects. In the material above, I gave some important names. Now I want to give some resources on various related topics.

For those who are in leadership in the church and want resources specifically pertaining to their calling to protect the church as a whole, there are a few resources I can recommend. One of them is the book, *On Guard: Preventing and Responding to Child Abuse at Church* by Deepak Reju. This book was also reviewed in the February 15, 2022 *Standard Bearer* by Rev. J. Engelsma. I would especially emphasize reading the first section of the book, “Getting Familiar with the Problem of Child Abuse.” Another book that I can recommend is

Protecting Your Church Against Sexual Predators: Legal FAQs for Church Leaders, by Voyle A. Glover. This is the book that our consistory in Randolph has read through, as we seek to become more educated on the issue. It is similar to Reju's book and focuses on giving legal advice for dealing with predators in the church. It also gives advice for protecting the church against the possibility of child sexual abuse (for example, those churches that have boys serving in nursery might reconsider that practice after reading this book), and it gives an honest treatment (from a legal perspective) of the reality of recidivism for perpetrators.

For those who want to share an inexpensive book with someone who tends to minimize the evil of sexual abusers, one resource would be *Myths We Believe, Predators we Trust...: 37 Things You Don't Want to Know About Abuse in Church (But You Really Should)* by Sarah McDugal and Daron Pratt.

Finally, besides resources on sexual abuse, there are many resources on other forms of abuse as well. Darby Strickland's book *Is It Abuse?: A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* covers different kinds of abuse, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, spiritual abuse, and financial abuse. Her chapter "Uncovering Sexual Abuse" will be good for those who want to learn more about how sexual abuse can take place within marriage. "Women tell me stories of being lectured (sometimes for hours), told that they will be shown no affection

unless it culminates in sex, or made to feel responsible for their husbands' use of pornography. Sex on demand has become an expectation or a 'right' for the husband" (p. 154). That is just one description of sexual abuse in marriage; others involve disregard for a woman's physical health, demanding unwanted acts, coercion/threatening, constant criticism about their body, and more. Strickland writes,

Years ago, I came across a study that helped me to better understand what goes on inside an oppressor's heart. The study asked rapists—of both partners and strangers—why they raped. It found that whether a man rapes a stranger, his wife, or his partner, he does so for the same reasons: power, anger, retaliation, sexual arousal from causing pain and fear, a preference for coercive over consensual sex, and a deep sense of entitlement.... [Studies such as this] helped me to see that sexually abusive husbands operate the same way that sex offenders do. They are purposeful sinners" (pp. 152-153).

To understand sexual abuse, it will be worth your while to educate yourself on other forms of abuse as well, and how an oppressive man thinks.

We have an abundance of resources. The question is: Are we willing to be educated? May the Lord give us all teachable spirits. May the Lord give us all listening hearts. And may Christ dwell in our midst more and more, and continue to teach us how to handle the topic in a way that honors Him.

I am a victim, survivor, and overcomer

I have agreed to write anonymously, but I must caution all of us on this approach because of two dangers it presents. One, this sends an unwanted message to the abused that they must remain hidden from view and must not speak out about their abuse. Two, this provides relief to the perpetrator of the crime that they will not be found out and are actually allowed to continue to abuse in obscurity, leaving the lambs of God in grave danger as the wolf continues to roam unhindered amongst the sheep.

This is what happened in my case.¹

¹ In my decades-long journey through these three stages mentioned in my title, I have relied heavily on this book for my understanding of what happened to me: *The Wounded Heart* (NavPress, 2008, rev. ed.) by Dan B. Allender. Although I do not quote him word for word, Dr. Allender's ideas and work can be seen throughout my article. I heartily thank him for helping me and highly recommend his book(s) to anyone who is struggling to understand the dynamics of sexual abuse.

Sexual abuse comes in many forms. I broadly categorize them here from the lesser to the greater as: 1) verbal and/or visual sexual abuse; 2) sexual interaction—improper touching that does not include the sexual organs; 3) sexual contact—touching of the sexual organs/intercourse. All of these categories of abuse are greatly damaging to the soul/psyche of the victim. I do not want to minimize the damage that has occurred to others in the 'lesser' categories in any respect. But the perspective that I bring is that of a victim of the worst sort—sexual contact. My abuser was a pedophile which, by definition, is one who is sexually attracted to children. I was raped at the age of 13.

I was an eleven-year-old boy and my abuser a female teacher in our Christian schools, in a position of power/authority over me. The grooming/testing process was textbook. It began with making me feel special in front

of the other students. It included special favors that no others were able to enjoy. She spent a great deal of time telling me how I was more special than most. How I was more mature and talented than others. Once the stage was set, the touching that at first appears appropriate began—hand holding, back rubs, hugs. This progressed to inappropriate touching, full frontal hugging, and intimate kissing, which in turn, proceeded to sexual contact.

It is easier for a victim to hide from their abuse than to face it. To confront the abuse involves the victim in a war. The victim must enter into an internal battle against the part of them that does not want to face the pain of examining the violence done to their person, and an external battle against fellow Christians who do not want to take the hard steps that need to be taken when abuse is exposed. What follows are some of the things I have discovered in my internal battle. I do not have space to write about the very real external battle that continues to this day.

Sensuous touch. The sex-crazed, wicked world in which we live has virtually destroyed the boundary between sensuous (physical) touch and sexual touch. To the wicked world the one is always an invitation to the other. But there is good physical touch that is normal and can be enjoyed by even the smallest child. For example, a parent cuddling with their son or daughter provides for the small child sensuous pleasure that is nourishing to his/her soul. Another example would be a back rub from parent to a young child—the child feels pleasure that has absolutely nothing to do with sexual arousal. Or two adolescent children, a boy and a girl who are attracted to each other and hold hands for the first time. There is physical pleasure that is enjoyed; sexual arousal has not even entered their young, immature minds.

My abuser used sensuous touch against me with touching that appears appropriate—hand holding, back rubs, and hugs. I was confused and frightened when these things began to occur, but sexual arousal was the furthest thing from my mind. My teacher betrayed her authority/power position already in the development stage previously described, but the introduction of this touching stage was a much larger, damaging betrayal. The confusion of my role as young boy into an adult relationship that my immature mind was not ready for was a violent act against my psyche. The physical touch of hand-holding and back rubs that were so good from mom and dad were turned into a violent act against my mind and soul.

I cannot enter into a description of what followed for the sake of this magazine. But I can tell you that

what followed is the most damaging aspect of sexual abuse—this attack against the person of the child who is not ready for this kind of relationship. The mind and the body are ripped apart. Any sexual arousal that is occurring—this good gift of God to His people to be wholly enjoyed in the bond of marriage—is turned into a horror show for the abused. The devastating effects are felt by me to this day. If you touch me, I will flinch. If you hug me, I will pull away. Just think of what it would be like to have to force yourself to hug your mother or father because you know that's what they want, but at the same time the hugging reviles you? Devastating damage.

Powerlessness. I did not ask for this. A young boy at the age when all this began for me is only beginning to become aware of his sexuality. There was no choice involved. I simply followed the directions that were given to me, trusting the teacher in her authority over me. When things began to get 'weird' I became frightened. I did not understand that I was being groomed. I kept hoping that someone would notice and stop what was happening. I prayed that God would intervene and put an end to it. My immature mind concluded that something like this had never happened to anyone before, that this was something new in the history of the world. God must have a special plan for me, I thought. Something great was going to come out of all of this. But none of that happened. It only got worse and worse. I was powerless to change anything. I could tell no one or my world would be destroyed. I accepted it as my 'normal' and lived the best I could with it. I felt small and all alone. The seeds of despair and bitterness were sown and, unchecked, brought forth the fruits of anger and rage.

Rejection. This is all I began to know. My abuser rejected me. The teacher I expected, in her power position, to care for me instead abused me. I wanted love and acceptance from her, but my want was rejected and instead I got her vile and selfish lusts for what she wanted. I wanted her to stop, instead I had to endure her abuse for six years. I tried to tell a friend at the beginning when I knew things were going very wrong. I told my friend that my teacher was kissing and touching me in ways I knew were wrong. My friend laughed at me and told me to stop making up crazy stories for attention. *Rejection.* Don't tell anyone, you will not be believed. Perhaps I would be put in jail for the gross things that were occurring. I was to be blamed. It was my fault for being so stupid. "Save me, God...." But the abuse continued. More *rejection.* I knew He still

cared for me, but nevertheless I felt that even He was rejecting me.

Betrayal. Our lives are built on trust relationships. Children trust father and mother to take care of them. They trust mom and dad for protection, for food, for shelter. They run to mom and dad for understanding and comfort. The child puts the same trust in the broader family relationships—grandpa and grandma, uncle and aunt, and cousins. Trust relationships are built in school. The child comes to place the same kind of trust in the Christian school teacher, the principal, the choir or band director, sports coach, and others. When someone in the position of power in a trust relationship abuses their power and authority in the way of sexual abuse, they commit a great betrayal of the trust relationship. This results in untold damage to the victim. I no longer trusted anyone—not my parents, not my grandpa and grandma, not my uncles and aunts, not my teachers—not anyone in a power position over me. I became an angry, rebellious young man.

Shame. This is a complex subject, and because of space constraints I will have to keep this short. I could easily make an hour-long speech about shame. There is, of course, legitimate shame. We are legitimately ashamed when we sin. We are legitimately ashamed when we offend our neighbor. We are legitimately ashamed of our natural depravity, and we are so blessed to be able to escape our shame when we flee into the arms of our Savior, recognizing that He has taken our shame upon Himself and paid the price for it in our place.

But the abused battles a different shame—an *illegitimate* shame. It was my fault. I am so stupid. How could I let something like this happen to me? If anyone finds out about what has happened, I will be ruined. If anyone finds out that I have been intimately involved with this teacher, they will be so grossed out I will never be able to show my face again...ever. So, I will bury my (illegitimate) shame. I will never let anyone see my 'shame.' I will ferociously hide my 'shame,' no one will ever pry it out of me. It is quite normal for an abused person to hold on to their 'shame' for decades. If you suspect an abused person is being abused and ask them if so and so is abusing them, it is quite normal for them to look you stone cold in the face and deny it. If the abused does decide to share their 'shame,' it will normally only be with their closest confidant, their best and most trusted friend.

Contempt. The abused will turn to self-centered contempt or other-centered contempt. I will speak of my choice—self-contempt—and perhaps you can look up the other. I grew to detest myself. I blamed myself for everything that had occurred. If I made any blunder (even after the abuse ended, even to this day I battle it), I would beat myself up over and over for my mistake. Hyper-criticism of myself was the norm for many years. Making a mistake in public was the worst. If I would, say, drop a bag of groceries in front of everyone at the store, my reaction would not be the normal reaction of laughing it off. I would instead become furious, scoop up my groceries, and run out of the store as fast as possible. Then I would proceed to beat myself up over it for the rest of the night and probably even have trouble getting to sleep, reliving the embarrassing moment over and over in my mind.

Anger. Oh, the anger, or should I say rage. We know that there is a righteous anger that the abused person may have over their abuse. But when the abuse is not properly dealt with, when the abuse is hidden away because of illegitimate shame, an unholy anger begins to take hold in the heart of the abused. This can result in terrible damage in the victim's relationships with their family and beyond. If you are reading this and are experiencing this kind of anger/rage, I appeal to you to please reach out to someone you trust for help. Find someone who understands these dynamics that I am writing about. There are many of us out there who want to help you find the relief that I have found. Perhaps some time I will write another article to fully explain the healing that I have found by the grace of God.

Diane Langberg is a seasoned, professional Christian counselor for the abused. Please look her up on the Internet if you are suffering from abuse. Her healing strategy of talking, tears, and time is so accurate. You must talk it out; don't try to keep all the garbage of abuse in your head. You must mourn over it with a trusted confidant—more than once and probably for a time. Then more time. The process of my healing took five years. The relief began immediately, so don't let "five years" scare you away. There is plenty of help waiting—reach for it. God will provide you with the strength you need. Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are. He was stripped naked and horribly abused in public. You will find that He was with you even when you thought He left.

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Thou knowest all my woes,
O treasure Thou my tears;
Are they not in Thy book,
Where all my life appears?
My foes shall backward turn
When I appeal to Thee,
For this I surely know,
That God is still for me.

In God, the Lord, I rest,
His word of grace I praise,
His promise stands secure,
Nor fear nor foe dismays;
In God I put my trust,
I neither doubt nor fear,
For man can never harm
With God my helper near.

Psalter 151, stanzas 4, 5



Announcements

Call to Synod!!

Synod 2022 appointed Zion Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, MI the calling church for the 2022 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2022 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 14, 2022 at 8:00 A.M., in the Zion Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, MI.

The Pre-synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 13, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. R. Kleyn, president of the 2021 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Mike Potjer, potjerm@gmail.com.

Consistory of
Zion PRC
Mike Potjer, Clerk.

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 11, 2022 at 8:00 A.M., in the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland.

Rev. Clayton Spronk,
Stated Clerk

On behalf of Faith PRC Convention Publicity Committee

The Program Committee from Faith PRC is seeking volunteers for special numbers at the 2022 YP Convention. We know that there are MANY talented young people! Find a friend or two and put something together—solos, duets, and groups are encouraged! God will be praised and the other young people will be encouraged and blessed! Please contact Jessica VanDyke with a call or text at 616-261-5457 or jessicavd11@gmail.com.

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. R. Kleyn

May 1—Joseph the Prime Minister
Genesis 41:41-57

May 8—The Path to Reconciliation
Genesis 42:1-25

May 15—When It Seems That Everything Is Against You
Genesis 42:26-43

May 23—Loving Discipline
Genesis 43:15-44:13

May 30—I Am Joseph
Genesis 44:14-45:15